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AUTHOR	Wardle, Francis
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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on differences in Brazil and the United States in attitudes toward multiracial and multiethnic children and developmentally appropriate practice in education and child rearing. Child rearing in Brazil is characterized by a generally permissive approach with a high degree of patience, although parent-child relationships among the very poor are more direct and more punitive. The debate about developmentally appropriate practice in schools in Brazil, where the differences between the ruling class and the lower class are clear, is the same philosophical debate that drives all curriculum decisions: Is the role of education to perpetuate society as it is or to change it to what it should be? Brazil does take an approach to interracial marriage and mixed-race children that is very different than that traditionally taken in the United States. In the United States, racial classification is driven by genetics and the historical "one drop" of blood rule, but the Brazilian system is based purely on physical appearance and therefore open to individual judgment. Some argue that the Brazilian approach still places the black population at the bottom of the social order, but the approach is clearly much better for mixed race children, who find more acceptance than they would in the United States where they would be thought of as belonging to the minority race. (Contains 18 references.) (SLD)

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Francis Wardle

Center for the Study of Biracial Children
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Multiracial Children and Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Brazil: Some Preliminary Observations

by

Francis Wardle

Until very recently multicultural education in the U.S. has focused on addressing issues and needs of traditional minority groups, girls, and exceptional children within the United States (Davidman and Davidman, 1997). However, we have recently begun to expand our concept of multicultural to include diversity between countries, and diversity within countries beyond the U.S. In fact, cultural differences between countries - even for the same population group - are often more extreme than differences within the U.S. After all, everyone in the U.S. is part of the overall U.S. macro-culture. (U.S. writers tend to use the word 'American' to describe people who live in the United States. This is, of course, inaccurate, since America covers every country from Canada to the Falkland Islands; American people include all people from Alaskans and Hawaiians to Brazilians, Guatemalans, Belizeans and Paraguayans. Even the word African American technically includes black members of Costa Rica, Brazil and Mexico). The acceptance of cultural differences between nations is beginning to be recognized in the U.S. early childhood community, with the establishment of the World Forum on Early Care and Education Conference, sponsored by CCIE; the Young Children International on-line information by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, international conferences such as the international playground safety conference recently held at Pennsylvania State University, and groups like the International Play Association. For some time, of course, the early childhood community has been fascinated with Reggio Emilia, and attracted by

Australia's approach to multicultural education, although it must be noted both countries have a Western educational philosophy. In this spirit of international multiculturalism I recently visited Brazil and studied several aspects of their culture that relate to early childhood education.

The value of examining other country's approaches to educational issues

As we struggle with educational issues such as standards, cultural pluralism and equity, democracy in schools, and funding approaches to make quality schools more accessible to all children, we should examine the approaches taken on these issues by other countries.

Another reason we should study educational approaches used by other countries is because we are rapidly reaching a point where the U.S. is being viewed by the rest of the world - especially developing countries - as having all the answers. When I met with professionals in Brazil on a variety of educational issues, they always asked, "How do you deal with this issue in the U.S.? How can we learn from your approach? Can we send someone over to the states to learn how you do it?" With the U.S. dominating world politics and finance, and with its cultural dominance throughout the world through videos, films, TV programs, Disney, etc, we are involved in what I call cultural imperialism. While this may or may not be negative regarding popular culture, for other countries to automatically adopt U.S. approaches to issues like developmentally appropriate practice, multicultural curriculum, women's issues, and playground safety, etc., seems to me a major mistake. We cannot be so arrogant as to assume solutions we have developed are right for other countries - even if we like these solutions!

So it is critically important for us to learn from approaches used in other countries.

The two areas I decided to study during my recent trip to Brazil were developmentally appropriate practice, and meeting the needs of multiracial and multiethnic children.

Developmentally appropriate practice

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There is continuing debate about whether developmentally appropriate practice is a philosophical educational approach that is applicable - albeit used with flexibility (Wardle, 1999) - for all children. Several writers and educators suggest that developmentally appropriate practice is simply not suitable for U.S. minority children - that it is an imposition of white, Eurocentric, oppressor values and approaches (Lubeck, 1996 ; O'Brian, 1996). The addition of a cultural factor to the revised developmentally appropriate publication (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), would seem to support this argument. Since I am an ardent advocate of both developmentally appropriate practice and of providing the best possible educational approach to minority children, I keenly observed parent attitudes toward child rearing in Brazil. During my visit I had the privilege of staying with several families who had small children. I also observed parent interactions with children in shopping centers, playgrounds, city streets and city parks.

What I observed was a generally permissive approach that included open and frequent hugs and kisses (more than most U.S. families) by many adults in the extended family, not just parents; use of verbal explanations and persuasion to alter behavior, and an extreme level of patience. The last behavior is probably a result of the laid back approach Brazilians have to time, and a culture that enjoys conversing and debating.

While I did observe arguing, direct commands, and consistent struggles with a very lively 2 year old, I only observed one example of what I consider punishment - a gentle swipe at the two year old's rear end by her father. In the families I observed the father was the designated disciplinarian. I observed no time outs, no withdraw of privileges, and no use of positive rewards.

"We must let children have freedom. We must not impose our will on them - we must let them develop in their own way". This was a comment to me by Dr. Joao Meira, a surgeon I was

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staying with, as we observed a struggle between his granddaughter and her parents. Dr. Meira hung back and let the parents handle it.

Janet Gonzalez-Mena has suggested that developmentally appropriate practice is a Northern European approach to child rearing that focuses on developing internal controls in children; while people of southern heritage (Hispanics and African Americans) are more likely to rely on the eyes and ears of the entire community to monitor a child's behavior (1993). She also suggests there are cultural differences between traditional U.S. cultural groups around personal possessions and competition among children. The Brazilians I observed are culturally and linguistically direct descendants of the original Portuguese colonists. Brazil's colonial (dominant) heritage is Portuguese. Portugal and Spain are both part of the Iberian Peninsular - in fact at one time they were under the same governments. The Brazilians I observed exhibited extreme overt affection, patience, lots of verbal explanations, gave children choices, and allowed for considerable mess and developmentally appropriate behavior. By Northern European standards (those I was raised with) these children were spoiled; their parents permissive.

However, the Portuguese descendants, unlike the Hispanics in the U.S. (although like the Hispanics in other S. American countries) are culturally and politically the ruling class; their language the conquerors's language.

I did view some parent-child interactions between poor families - and these were more direct and punitive. I also realized as I observed very poor young children playing as their parents sold fruit and other products on the side of busy highways, while huge trucks passed by at excessive speeds, that these parents simply cannot afford to give their children choices, and allow then to learn from mistakes. Further, pure necessity requires working poor parents to rely on all members present to help them discipline and care for their children. And, at least in

Brazil, the poor families cannot afford to allow children to develop a sense of private property - there simply is too little to go around. Also, while observing both groups of Brazilians, it seemed clear to me that the poor children were being trained by their parents to function in a society where they will have to take orders and directions from the ruling class. Most poor people in Brazil become maids, service providers, and low level government employees.

Clearly in Brazil - and in other countries, I suspect - the issue is not what part of the world you are from, but, as Janice Hale points out in Unbank the Fire, (1994), "The reality is that children destined to be leaders of tomorrow are not being educated in skill and drill" (p. 207). The issues is whether you are being trained to be part of the ruling class, or to be part of the lower class. And in Brazil these two classes are extemely different. Thus the debate regarding developmentally appropriate practice in schools, at least in this example, is the same philosophical debate that drives all curriculum decisions: is the role of education to perpetuate society as it is, or to change it to be as we would like it to become (Wiles and Bondi, 1997).

Anyone who suggests minority children are not competitive has not viewed the individual competitive dances at a Native American pow-wow (as opposed to the social and ceremonial ones), or had the pleasure of attending one of the many club track meets held throughout this country. These meets are disproportionally attended and won by young African American track stars.

Children of multiracial and multiethnic heritage

Since the landmark civil rights legislation of the 1960s, educators in the U.S. have explored a variety of ways to enable minority students to have equal access to educational opportunities in our early childhood programs and schools (Davidman and Davidman, 1997). Multicultural education first addressed the needs of African American, Hispanic and Native

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American students; later added the needs of girls, and then, with the passage of IDEA and ADA, included exceptional children - including the gifted (Davidman and Davidman, 1997). Recently there has been a call to also include the unique needs of multiracial and multiethnic children (Cruz-Janzen, 1997; King, 1999; Wardle, 1987).

As we struggle to find the best approach to educate these children, I thought I would carefully study the very different approach of the Brazilian society to this population.

U.S. approach to mixed-race people

Our current approach to raising and education multiracial and multiethnic children is an outgrowth of two fundamental U.S. ideas: the official - and societal - historical taboo against interracial marriages and relationships (that extended to all white/people of color situations (Spickard, 1989), and our view that race and ethnicity are single, unitary concepts, with no middle ground: no place people with more than one heritage).

These two positions are, of course, and outgrowth of our unique history. The official taboo against mixed marriage was not officially outlawed until Loving v. Virginia in 1967. Initially in the early colonial period blacks and whites married and had children (Spickard, 1989). In fact, these children were viewed by some as the New Americans: an example of a new and egalitarian society. However, as the number of slaves increased, so did the taboo against interracial relationships. The first court decision against interracial sexual contact was decided in 1630, when a West Virginian was convicted of shaming God and Christians by lying with a Negro (Spickard, 1989). This taboo gained momentum in the early 18th century, as legislatures passed laws to clarify the distinction between free whites and slaves. Gradually a series of laws and court decisions were created to prevent intermarriage. These were driven by religious beliefs and fear that progeny of interracial relationships would join with slaves and overthrow the white

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slave owners (Spickard, 1989).

Generally these anti-miscegenation laws covered all white/people of color relationships in the US.

Another way to keep blacks and whites separate - a critical concept to maintain slavery - was the creation of the one-drop rule. These were state laws that declared anyone with any black heritage (one drop of black blood) would always be considered legally black. Thus children of mixed parentage would remain slaves, and not allowed to become free.

The second concept that has so much influence on current US approach to mixed-race children - the idea that people must belong exclusively to one racial or ethnic group - what I call census bureau categories - came out of the 1964-65 Civil Rights legislation. Part of this legislation was designed to assure all public funds - federal and state - would be equitably distributed among all U.S citizens, especially those who historically had not received adequate government support. This concepts also covered voting districts and other federal legislation. To track the expenditure of funds the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) created Statistical Policy Directive 15, which created the 5 categories that are so prevalent today: Black, Hispanic (Latino), Asian American or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and White. An "other" category was not permitted; respondents could only fill out one category. Until the 2000 census, a person of mixed heritage was not permitted to fill out more than one category on school and other official forms (Benjamin-Wardle, 1991).

The result of these two trends is that most professionals, including educators, textbook writers, multicultural experts, psychologists, curriculum developers and school counselors, believe that mixed-race children must belong to a single racial category, usually that of the parent of color, and if the child is the product of two minority parents, then the parent of color

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with the lowest social status (Daniel, 1992). This issue of the racial identity of multiracial and multiethnic children in the U.S. is one of the central debates around raising and educating these children (Root, 1996).

The Brazilian approach to multiracial and multiethnic people

For a variety of complex reasons, Brazil has taken a very different approach both to the issue of interracial marriage, and to mixed-race children. In Brazil the original colonists were Portuguese men. And, for a long time, only men. Unlike the British in U.S., these colonists did not bring their families; and, unlike the Spanish in the rest of the America, they did not come with the intent of returning quickly to the home country. The Portuguese came, fell in love with Brazil, and stayed. Compared to the Native population, there were very few Portuguese. And, after slavery was introduced in Brazil, there were fewer Portuguese than slaves. To handle this discrepancy of number the Portuguese did the opposite of the settlers in North America: they decided to encourage interracial relationships and marriage, as a way to control the huge country (Murphy, 1999). Because the only Portuguese in Brazil were men, these relationships were initially between Portuguese men and indigenous women; later Portuguese men and black women. The Catholic church did not oppose this trend.

These relationships produced many children of mixed heritage. Again, unlike the approach taken in N. America, the Portuguese viewed these children as the New Brazilians: a new and unique population. These people are called brown by those who collect racial statistics, and now make up the largest - and ever expanding - population group in Brazil. Before slavery was officially abolished in Brazil in 1888, laws were passed freeing all children of slave/Portuguese heritage.

Today Brazil has, like the U.S., 5 broad racial categories, which are (using the Brazilian

terminology): white, black, brown, yellow and indigenous. But, unlike the U.S. categories, which are driven by genetic heritage and the one drop rule, the Brazilian system is based purely on physical appearance: skin color, hair texture, and facial features - which, of course, open to individual judgement Thus the white category includes most Portuguese, Hispanics, many mestizos, Germans, English, some people from the U.S. and some Asians; the brown category includes almost all mixed-race and ethnic people, some Portuguese, Middle Easterners and some Asian Indians; yellow includes Japanese, Chinese and Korean, and black includes descendants of slaves who are not mixed. Because the ruling class in Brazil is Portuguese, one suspects the white category is much broader in Brazil - including many who in this country would be considered people of color. It is very clear the lines between the groups are vague and fluid.

The Brazilian approach to categorizing race, and their history of supporting and advocating mixed-race relationships, means that they view some fundamental issues of race differently than we do. Specifically, any marriage of people within the brown category - say a person who is mixed-race but we would call black, with an indigenous person, is not considered interracial or interethnic, because its within the same group. Secondly, any mixed-race child automatically has a reference group - the largest population group in Brazil. And, thirdly, there is a very open acceptance of the whole issue of mixed-race heritage. Most whites I interviewed for this study openly suggested that all white people in Brazil have some black heritage in their background.

The Brazilian approach has been criticized by minority advocates in this country because it still places the black population at the bottom of the social order. While this is not technically true, because in Brazil the social order is strictly defined by family name, position and income, there is discrimination in Brazil toward the black population. (The new Brazilian constitution

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specifically forbids discrimination against people based on race, nationality and religion). However, as a social group, U.S. blacks are still struggling to achieve social and economic equality, which suggests neither approach has been successful in enabling blacks as a group to achieve equality.

Mixed-race children

But the Brazilian approach is clearly much better for mixed-race children. (This is within the overall country's context. As a group children in the US are far better off than children in Brazil). These children are viewed as being part of the norm (when my son, who is biracial, visited Brazil, he was assumed by everyone he met to be Brazilian), they are not forced, as they are in this country, to reject and hide part of their background (Cruz-Janzen, 1997). Also in Brazil these children have heros throughout Brazilian history, such as the great artist and sculpture from Colonial times, Aleijadinho. Most importantly mixed-race children in Brazil are not subject to the ridicule, insults, harassment and rejection by majority and minority children that so many multiracial and multiethnic children experience in this country (Cruz-Janzen, 1998). They can be proud of their total heritage, and proud of both their parents.

In the U.S. those of us raising our multiracial children as fully multiracial are constantly hounded by the refrain, "Society sees them as black, so you must raise them as black." In Brazil, society sees these children as brown, so they are raised as brown, and fully accepted as brown. In fact, many extended families in Brazil have someone married to or related to someone who is not white - and this is accepted as the norm, and not hidden.

But mixed-race children rarely see themselves on the TV, in advertisements, or in the school curriculum (with the exception of sports - especially futebal, salon futebal, professional volleyball - and popular entertainment.) And the school curriculum is still dominated by a

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Portuguese version of history and culture, and a very proper Portuguese language (Pereira, 2000). This is because the official version Brazil portrays to the rest of the world is still white - although this is slowly changing.

Conclusion

As we struggle to find solutions to a variety of educational challenges in this country, we should examine how other nations are addressing these same issues. We possibly can learn from them; we certainly must develop a world-wide perspective on educational topics if we want to claim to be truly multicultural. In this article I have chosen to present a Brazilian perspective on developmentally appropriate practice, and on raising children of mixed racial and ethnic heritage. I hope this view can enlighten educators struggling with these challenges in the U.S.

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